

LVII. *A Letter to the Rev. Thomas Birch, D.D. Secr. R. S. concerning the Number of the People of England; by the Rev. Mr. Richard Forster, Rector of Great Shefford in Berkshire.*

Rev^d Sir,

Shefford, Nov. 9. 1757.

Read Dec. 22.
1757.

SINCE I did myself the honour of writing to you in July †, my book-feller has sent me part ii. of vol. xlix. of the Transactions; in which * I find another medium advanced to determine the amount of the people in England: and this is the number of houses, which pay the window-tax, and which “amount to about 690,000, “besides cottages, that pay nothing.” To this is added, that “tho’ the number of cottages be not accurately known, it appears from the accounts given “in, that they cannot amount to above 200,000.”

Here I cannot but express my concern, that this very ingenious gentleman has not been a little more explicit, by informing us, what these accounts are, upon which he builds so positive a conclusion. The law requires no such accounts to be delivered in; and parish-officers cannot be accused of works of supererogation: besides (which is more to the purpose) I am very certain no such accounts have been given in from this part of the world. On the other hand, in all parts of England, which I have seen (and that is, I think, almost the whole) the number of cottages greatly exceeds that of all other houses, except in the middle of towns, and some villages about Lon-

† See above, p. 356.

* Page 887.

don. This is agreeable to the general interpretation of that sentence passed upon our original parent, that *he should eat bread by the sweat of his brows*; which is, that the majority of his descendents should be poor labouring people. This I do not mention with design to defend the interpretation, but only to shew the general sense of mankind.

As my notion of the matter differs so widely from that of this worthy gentleman, I did every thing in my power to check any mistake, which might arise from a fondness of one's own opinion; and which, I hope, will vindicate me in the eye of every candid inquirer. In a word, I set myself to count all the houses in several contiguous parishes; and then examined how many of them paid the window-tax, or duty upon houses. And here I must observe, that if there be any small mistake, it can hardly be supposed to be in favour of my own scheme; because I had the whole number of houses, by counting as I rode along; and some might possibly be missed, tho' of this I took the utmost care: whereas the number of those, that pay the window-tax, I had from the collectors rolls.

The following table is the fruit of my labours:

Great Shefford	—	90	—	17
Little Shefford	—	12	—	3
Welford	—	162	—	62
Chaddleworth	—	62	—	20
Bright-Walton	—	72	—	21
Catmore	—	10	—	1
Farmborough	—	34	—	5
Fawley	—	47	—	7
East Garston	—	99	—	41
		588	—	177

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Here we see, that out of 588 houses only 177 pay the window-tax. Now if we say with the philosopher *ex pede Herculem*, and suppose, that 200,000 taxable houses stand in the country, we shall have the following proportion, $177 : 588 :: 200,000 : 664406$, for the whole number of houses that stand in the country, commonly so called.

Again, Lamborn parish, in which is a market-town, contains 445 houses, of which 229 pay the window-tax. Now if we suppose, in like manner, 200,000 taxable houses to stand in country towns (I mean of the middling and inferior classes), we must then say $229 : 445 :: 200,000 : 388646$, the whole number of houses, that stand in country towns.

The remaining 290,000 houses must be placed in cities and flourishing towns; and must have Dr. Brakenridge's proportion assigned them; for without all doubt he had some reason for pitching upon such numbers; and as they could not be taken from country towns or villages, must be assumed from the present state of some flourishing place. Upon this supposition, we must say $690,000 : 200,000 :: 290,000 : 84,058$. for the number of cottages in great towns; which, if added to the houses that pay, makes the whole number in large towns to be 374,058. These three sums added together make the total amount of houses in the nation to be

$$\begin{array}{r}
 664,406 \\
 388,646 \\
 374,058 \\
 \hline
 1,427,110
 \end{array}$$

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The two former of these numbers should be multiplied by 5, and the latter by 6. The reason of this difference is the great quantity of servants kept in large towns.

$$\begin{array}{r} 1,053,052 \times 5 = 5,265,260 \\ 374,058 \times 6 = 2,244,348 \\ \hline 7,509,608 \end{array}$$

By this way of proceeding it appears, that the whole number of people now alive in England is somewhat more than seven millions and an half. I would not be understood, as if I meant to recommend this as exact; tho' I am in hopes, that, upon trial, it will be found nearer the truth, than any thing hitherto advanced. Neither will I lay any stress upon its approaching so near to the numbers advanced in my former letter; being sensible, that all the methods I have hitherto tried are liable to very great objections. Where certainty may be arrived at by a little industry, all hypothesis should be despised and rejected.

The militia act levies 32,000 men upon the whole kingdom; and in the west riding of Yorkshire 1 in 45, if my intelligence is right, completed their quota. Now if this proportion be applied to the whole nation, $32,000 \times 45$ will give 1,440,000 for the number of balloters; and this multiplied by 5 (which, considering the number of persons excepted, must be under the truth) will amount to 7,200,000 for the total of our people. But I dare not build any thing upon this computation, as many parts of the nation may have heavier quota's laid upon them than the west riding.

Whether the kingdom is really in a declining or increasing state, is, in like manner, a problem not to be solved, I think, by mere calculation. If there happens but a small mistake in the principles, what is built thereupon will be extremely wide of the truth. If one might take the liberty to guess by appearances, I should think we are greatly increased within these forty years, or since the accession of the present Royal Family. This conjecture I found upon the great facility, with which the government raises men, compared to the violent methods made use of in King William's and Queen Anne's time. Indeed I am sensible, that when the great ease, with which the government raises money, and the low interest it pays, have been urged in the House of Commons, as evident proofs of a flourishing trade, and plenty of cash, it has constantly been answered by a gentleman, who understands these matters better than any body else, that they are rather proofs of a want of trade, and that people do not know what to do with their money. In the same manner it may be answered, that the great facility, with which the government raises soldiers, is not owing so much to the great plenty of men, as to the want of employment: which it is possible may really be the case.

But where certainty may be had, it is trifling to talk of appearances and conjectures. For a century now past, the English way of philosophising (and all the rest of the world is come into it) is not to sit down in one's study, and form an hypothesis, and then strive to wrest all nature to it; but to look abroad into the world, and see how nature works; and then to build upon certain matter of fact. In compliance with this noble method, I have done all
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in my power: I have examined the registers of several neighbouring parishes, and send you the substance of three of the most perfect ones. Indeed, I could have added several others; but as they seem to have been now and then neglected, I did not care to trust to them. However, this I can safely deduce from them; *viz.* that what I have here sent will be a proper standard for these parts: and if other gentlemen would take the like pains (and it is next to nothing) in four or five parishes in each county, and in every great town, we might perceive, by one cast of the eye, whether our people are in an ebbing or flowing state. I have not set down the burials, as that would but have embarrassed the table; and the increase will appear very well without them. However, upon an average of all the parishes I have examined, the proportion of the burials to the baptisms is as 83 to 149,4.

	Lamborn.	Welford.	Shefford.	Total.
From 1614 to 1623 inclus.	327	67	69	463
1624 to 1633 —	401	62	64	527
1634 to 1643 —	391	119	86	596
1662 to 1671 —	441	146	93	680
1672 to 1681 —	380	132	108	620
1682 to 1691 —	451	201	112	764
1692 to 1701 —	366	134	88	588
1702 to 1711 —	387	137	84	608
1712 to 1721 —	422	171	97	690
1722 to 1731 —	483	156	106	745
1732 to 1741 —	578	205	128	911
1742 to 1751 —	566	253	137	956
1752 to 1756 —	349	120	64	533
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This table stands in need of no remarks : it speaks loud enough of itself, that our people increase in a very rapid manner. All I shall take the liberty of observing from it is, that all the registers I have looked over seem to resent the wretched policy of King Charles II. who submitted himself and kingdom too much to a powerful neighbour : and that our civil war had no effect upon our numbers, in comparison to our foreign wars.

I trust, that the very ingenious author of the *politico-arithmetical* letters, I have all along had my eye upon, will take no offence, if I recommend an article or two advanced by him to be reconsidered ; which, if pursued, might perhaps induce some small errors in government.

The first is, That all ways to increase our people would be for the public welfare, even the naturalizing of foreigners : whereas, if I remember right, all political writers lay it down as a maxim, that numbers of people without employment are a burden and disease to the body politic ; and where there is full employment, there the people multiply of course. So that we should not measure the happiness of the nation by the number of mouths, but by the number of hands. Nay, if we were to import a quantity of foreigners, we must immediately re-export them, as we actually did in the case of the Palatines and Saltzburghers. Indeed, I cannot deny, but that if the new-comers were to bring new trades with them, they would be welcome : tho' I apprehend it is not an easy matter to find out many new manufactures. I can at present think of nothing but the cambrick business;

business; and that, with a little encouragement, might be established in either Scotland or Ireland, without the importation of strangers.

The next thing I propose to be ruminated is the assertion, That our commerce at sea is one cause of the decay of our fencible men: which sounds in my ear like saying, that if we had less trade, we should have more people. And if this is the purport of it, I am afraid it is a paradox, literally so called.

That emigrations to our colonies do lessen our numbers in appearance, is beyond dispute: but then it is only in appearance: for if employment begets people, the filling our plantations must increase us beyond imagination, it having been made out, if I misremember not, that every man rightly occupied in America finds employment for three persons in Old England. But then care should be taken, that the planters were generally employed in raising rough materials; and that every thing imported there were manufactured by ourselves; because, if we settle colonies, and then supply them with East-India stuffs and foreign linens, it is neither better nor worse than being at a vast expence to maintain other people's poor.

I cannot conclude without begging leave to observe, that this gentleman's doctrine is, from beginning to end, to say the best of it, ill timed. We are contending with our hereditary enemy, the most powerful prince in the world, not for superiority, but for independence, *pro aris et focis*. And, at such a time as this, to be told, that we are but little better than half peopled, and the few we have
dwindling

dwindling away every day, is indeed very discouraging : whereas, on the contrary, I do not balance one moment to declare it, as my fixt persuasion, that we can spare 100,000 brisk young fellows, and still be the most populous flourishing nation in Europe.

I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your affectionate Brother,

and very humble Servant,

Richard Forster.

LVIII. *A Letter to the Right Honourable the Earl of Macclesfield, President of the Royal Society, from the Rev. William Brakenridge, D.D. F.R.S. containing an Answer to the Account of the Numbers and Increase of the People of England, by the Rev. Mr. Forster.*

My Lord,

Read Mar. 16,
1758.

AS I endeavoured, at a former meeting of the Society, to answer extempore some objections offered by a Gentleman in the country, to what I have wrote concerning the number of people in England ; I now presume to send you what I said then in writing, with some farther reflections. And this subject I never intended to

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